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ABSTRACT

During the next several years, nearly half of all U.S. principals will retire. Despite principals' crucial leadership role, the methods for training and selecting these administrators are often ill-suited for employing outstanding leaders. Patronage, favoritism, familiarity, or good impressions frequently prevail over merit. This bulletin begins by assessing problems within the principal preparation and selection process. Chapter 1 summarizes recent research and presents four possible explanations for districts' failure to identify, prepare, and hire the most effective principals: (1) insufficient attention to preparation; (2) a limited pool of capable applicants; (3) nonspecific vacancy announcements and selection criteria; and (4) inadequate screening and selection techniques. Chapter 2 examines principal preparation by documenting the experiences of two Oregon districts--Corvallis and David Douglas--with successful programs. Corvallis provides carefully designed internships, and David Douglas' STAR (Selecting and Training Administrative Recruits) program emphasizes practical training sessions for aspiring principals. Chapter 3 features exemplary screening and selection techniques used in Lake Oswego and Tigard school districts (Oregon). The final chapter summarizes effective employment practices and offers recommendations for districts desiring to capitalize on the coming "window of opportunity" presented by retiring principals. Included are 19 references and 11 interview citations. (MLH)

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HIRING CAPABLE PRINCIPALS
How School Districts Recruit, Groom, and Select the Best Candidates

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Mark E. Anderson

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Preface

Hiring capable principals may be the most important task school superintendents and school boards face in the next few years. Virtually all the reviews of research on effective schools point to the principal as the key to achieving excellence. The familiar adage, "so goes the principal, so goes the school," is on the mark in characterizing the importance of the principalship. During the next five years, nearly half of all American principals will retire. This presents a window of opportunity for school districts to hire many talented new principals.

Unfortunately, the means by which school districts train and select principals are often ill-suited to hiring the most capable candidates. Current studies and several leading educators suggest that school districts may not invest sufficient time, energy, and money to train and select principals. Yet an encouraging sign—documented in the following pages—is that some districts are willing to make the necessary investments to groom and hire the most capable candidates.

This Bulletin was written by Mark Anderson, an OSSC graduate research assistant. Anderson has been a principal for the last ten years in Washington State and is currently completing doctoral course work in the Division of Educational Policy and Management at the University of Oregon.

Philip K. Piele
Executive Secretary

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Introduction

Amidst the accumulating body of research on effective schools and the current call for school reform, the principal has emerged as the key person in school improvement efforts. A principal's leadership is among the most crucial elements necessary for school success, and a successful school almost always boasts of having an outstanding principal.

During the next five to eight years, nearly half of all current principals in the United States will retire. This presents a "window of opportunity" for school districts to hire talented principals who can lead our nation's schools into the 21st century. As a recent publication by the U.S. Department of Education suggests:

> We must take this opportunity to fill our schools with dynamic, committed leaders, for they provide the key to effective schools where we will either win or lose the battle for excellence in education.

Unfortunately, the means by which American principals are trained and selected are often ill-suited to the employment of outstanding leaders. According to John Goodlad, the hiring of principals is "to say the least, casual. Most new principals are plucked out of the classroom in June and plunged into the job soon after" (interviewed by Sally Banks Zakariya).

Robert Dentler likewise believes the school principal selection process is "ridden with chance" and often does not conform to sound policy. As he told Zakariya,

> In most places, principal selection still operates on the buddy system. Without changes in the integrity and vitality of the selection process, the ablest educational leaders may never turn their faces towards the principalship.

The selection of principals is too important to be left to chance. Patronage, favoritism, familiarity, or a candidate's ability to make a good first impression should not be allowed to edge out merit. Goodlad, Dentler, and many other observers recommend that school districts begin grooming future principals long before they are needed and base their selection on merit.

This Bulletin begins with an assessment of problems within the principal preparation and selection process. In chapter 2, attention turns to some of the effective ways representative Oregon Districts—notably Corvallis and David

Douglas—identify and groom future principals. Chapter 3 features exemplary screening and selection techniques used in the Lake Oswego and Tigard school districts to select the most capable candidates. The final chapter summarizes effective employment practices and offers recommendations for districts that wish to capitalize upon the coming "window of opportunity."

I am indebted to many administrators in the Corvallis, David Douglas, Lake Oswego, and Tigard schools for sharing their time and insights into effective strategies for preparing and selecting the most capable principals. Without their openness and candor, I would not have gained many of the practical ideas that are shared in this Bulletin.

Chapter 1

Problems within the Principal Preparation and Selection Process

Current studies suggest that many school districts may not be identifying, preparing, and hiring the most capable principals. This chapter presents a summary of that research and proposes four possible explanations: (1) insufficient attention to preparation, (2) a limited pool of capable applicants, (3) nonspecific vacancy announcements and selection criteria, and (4) inadequate screening and selection techniques.

Insufficient Attention to Preparation

The preservice training of principals has come under increased fire during the last few years from a variety of persons, national commissions, and principals themselves. Collectively, these criticisms are aimed at College of Education programs and school districts for not providing the field-based experiences necessary for developing outstanding principals.

Kathleen McCormick, citing the 1986 National Governor's Association report on education, *Time for Results*, says the certification of principals is currently not based on results, but on educational requirements. "Too often," the report states, "a candidate's ability to provide instructional leadership does not have to be demonstrated and is not even considered." The national governor's report recommends that public schools become more actively involved in the preparation of principals by making clinical experiences a key element in training, certifying, and hiring principals.

Just one year later the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), in a report entitled *Leaders for America's Schools*, expanded the concerns found in the national governor's report relative to principal preparation. The UCEA report states that research reveals troubling aspects

throughout the process of principal preparation, including lack of collaboration between school districts and universities and lack of preparation programs relevant to the job demands of school administrators. Universities, school districts, and professional organizations should cooperate more fully in the preparation of school principals, the report argues. For example, programs could be developed to provide faculty for campus classrooms, to participate in field research, and to provide and supervise extensive field-based clinical experiences for aspiring principals.

Full-Time Internships Are Needed

The idea of internships, which gives prospective principals a chance to try their hands at real-life school administration, is not new; full-time practicums are still the exception rather than the rule, however. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching favored extensive internship experiences for principal hopefuls in its 1983 study, *High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America*. Carnegie's president, former U.S. Commissioner of Education Ernest L. Boyer, recommends a career ladder for prospective principals that includes formal training plus a one-year administrative internship in which the candidate works closely with an experienced and successful principal.

Lynn Cornett, in her 1983 study of principal preparation and selection, found that a majority of graduate students in educational administration programs do not participate in extensive internship training programs, for several reasons:

> Problems are inherent in implementing field-based experiences that are satisfying to all involved. They are expensive, and require more time, energy, and staff than regular classroom programs. Cooperative arrangements between host administrators and university supervisors can sometimes lead to conflict. The success of the program rests with the school district and its commitment to the program.

The shortcomings of the current principal preparation process are spelled out in John Goodlad's *A Place Called School*, the 1983 landmark study of U.S. public schools. Goodlad says, "It is simply not established procedure in the educational system to identify and groom cadres of the most promising prospects for top positions, as is the case with IBM, for example." Goodlad believes it's nonsense to wait until you need a principal to start looking for one.

If Goodlad could have his way, enterprising school systems would adopt a two-pronged approach to principal preparation and selection. "First", he writes, "there should be a continuous district-wide effort to identify employees with leadership potential," looking first to peer recognition to find the possible leaders. "Second, the district must be willing to make an investment designed to pay off in the future." For instance, a district can arrange and pay for potential candidates to take part in two-year study programs carefully planned to balance academic study and one or more internships as assistant principals.

We will see a modification of this approach when we look at Corvallis' internship program in chapter 2.

School Systems Must Invest in Training

Such programs will certainly cost money, Goodlad told Sally Banks Zakariya in an interview for *The Executive Educator*. Goodlad says school districts must start bearing the expense of training administrative candidates.

> Too many school systems and boards are fearful of making changes because of the money involved, so they come up with half-baked answers. We've got to bite the bullet on this one. Better principals, like anything else, will cost money.

According to Catherine Baltzell and Robert Dentler, "The extent to which the school system invests in the preparation of principals is an index to other aspects of system quality." Coauthors of the 1983 National Institute of Education-sponsored study, *Selecting American School Principals*, Baltzell and Dentler found that many districts are not willing to make such an investment and, consequently, do not have a qualified pool of potential candidates from which to choose when an opening occurs.

Baltzell and Dentler cite some exemplary districts, however, that do provide the necessary training for prospective principals. Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland began its leadership transformation efforts twenty years ago. In its Administrative Training Program, potential principals apply for and take a ten-week afterwork course on leadership. Graduates may then opt for a second eighteen-week, three-credit course in administrative leadership, which includes skill development.

After candidates complete this two-part sequence, senior administrators review all performance and related educational records of applicants and rank them from one to four. Highest scoring candidates are then invited to Administrative Competence Seminars, where their interpersonal skills, communication and conceptual skills, and group leadership skills are formally assessed by a panel of senior administrators.

Training programs like the one in Montgomery County are highly desirable, but they are still very rare, according to the U.S. Department of Education's *Principal Selection Guide*. As the document suggests, school districts must begin to

> enlist the aid of educational consultants; collaborate with universities to frame courses for their trainees; or initiate their own training programs. Comprehensive preparation programs should feature excellent instructors, coherent requirements, and substantive content—focusing on curriculum, instruction, supervision, leadership, and theories of management and change. Requiring certain prerequisite skills to enroll and successful demonstration of them to exit, such programs should also include field experience that gives trainees the opportunity to integrate theory and practice.

The dismal prospects of inadequate training programs for school principals is not without hope. The Division of Educational Policy and Management

(DEPM) at the University of Oregon is proposing a project to improve the training and preparation of future school leaders that will involve cooperation among the university, the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators, and the Oregon School Boards Association. In its proposal, *Beyond Academics in the Preparation of Educational Leaders,* DEPM proposes a new kind of field-based training program for principals that includes the following components: assessment of principal aspirants at the NASSP assessment center, extensive mentorship experiences with practicing school administrators, weekend institutes focusing on educational leadership, and management courses cooperatively taught and led by school administrators and university faculty.

As we shall see in chapter 2, some Oregon districts—notably David Douglas—are also taking on the challenge of principal preparation. David Douglas has developed a training program for prospective principals similar to those suggested in the Department of Education document. To increase their pool of qualified principal candidates, David Douglas has committed additional time and resources to train administrative recruits. A limited pool of capable candidates is another problem within the principal preparation and selection process.

A Limited Pool of Capable Candidates

Although the pool of principal candidates is large—many individuals hold appropriate certification—there is reason to believe the number of "highly capable" applicants may be dwindling. Through interviews with school leaders across the country for *The Executive Educator*, Kathleen McCormick was able to document a growing concern about a pending shortage of "rising stars" for the principalship. Scott Thompson, executive director of the 42,000-member National Association of Secondary School Principals, told McCormick, "We don't have enough top-notch people to fill the jobs." Thompson added, "We have to do a better job of preparing people for administrative positions to improve the pool of capable candidates."

Superintendent Frank Cleary of Binghamton, New York, told McCormick, "I don't see as many people coming up through the system who have the burning desire to climb the administrative ladder." One reason, Cleary explained, is that teaching itself is becoming a more attractive career: salaries are improving and teachers are being given greater control over and responsibility for what happens in the classroom. "Teachers spend more time looking at the pros and cons of administration," he says. Because of the high cost of moving and complications resulting from two-career families, he added, "the list of cons outweigh the pros, unless you can stay in the same district."

As discouraging as all this might sound, education leaders do agree the next few years will open up vast opportunities for talented and dedicated

newcomers, including women and minorities. Effie H. Jones, associate executive director of the American Association of School Administrators, told McCormick, "There are plenty of talented women and minorities who are now certified to take administrative positions." Thompson agrees "there are more strong women candidates than ever before." In the end, says McCormick, the exodus of experienced principals "might be just the window of opportunity that women and ethnic minorities have been waiting for. That is, if today's school leaders take the initiative to help train them."

Ways to Expand the Applicant Pool

Several studies call for school districts to make a concerted effort to expand the pool of qualified principal applicants. Outside recruitment, indistrict training programs, career ladders, and internships are all ways for districts to exert such effort.

Outside Recruitment. According to John Goodlad, "School districts would be well advised—and perhaps should be required—to select, for posts available, from a pool of qualified applicants extending far beyond district lines." This procedure does not nullify a district's investment in principal preparation, he adds. "With all districts similarly engaged in the process, interest from investments would be shared."

Many educators echo Goodlad's opinion and believe school districts too often limit their vacancy announcements to narrow geographic areas. The U.S. Department of Education's *Principal Selection Guide* criticizes this practice and recommends that

> Announcements should be placed in large circulation newspapers in cities within a 500-mile radius of the vacancy. If the district is itself in a large city, the search committee might advertise the opening in similar cities. To avoid becoming too ingrown, search committees should advertise in principal and superintendent newsletters, in education journals, and in the publications or at the conferences of professional associations. There are many options, but the most important thing is to avoid a narrow search that ends too soon.

Outside recruitment does not consist of simply advertising vacancies beyond local boundaries, but also focuses on finding and targeting individuals in other districts who are perceived as highly desirable candidates. According to Baltzell and Dentler, "If all goes well, the outsider is ultimately brought in. However, it is usually an outsider with a firm inside connection to the network." Districts with limited pools of applicants rarely recruit in such a manner.

Career Ladders. Career ladders are another means by which to expand the pool of qualified applicants, but, again, this method is more the exception than the rule in many school systems. Career ladders can include positions for curriculum and staff development specialists, head teachers, department chairs, deans, and assistant principals.

Exemplary districts, Baltzell and Dentler note, utilize the following procedures:

1. well-defined and well-known career ladders to the principalship, which include universally available development opportunities and careful on-the-job scrutiny of candidates by top district administrators
2. rigorous screening at entry-level positions, conducted by a diversified team composed mainly of school-level staff
3. team interviewing of screened and approved applicants for specific vacancies by top administrative leaders in the district

Although career ladders are a way to test applicants' leadership abilities, many times districts do not provide individuals with the diversified experiences in these positions that are necessary for grooming outstanding principals. This is especially true of the assistant principal position, according to James Lindsay:

> Too few assistant principals are groomed for higher positions; they receive narrow, theoretical training, and the on-the-job experience they have is just as narrow. Usually, an assistant principal is treated as a single-facet administrator-prepared, for instance, to be only a disciplinarian or only a director of activities. As a result, most assistant principals learn only a few of the many job skills they need to be good principals.

Lindsay believes in providing assistant principals with experience in all facets of building administration to improve a district's pool of trained and tested principal candidates. Principals themselves, Lindsay notes, play an important role in this training process:

> As a principal, you owe it to your assistants to help them develop into well-rounded, qualified professionals who are prepared to move into new, challenging positions. There's no magic to the process. All it requires is dedication and the willingness to make school administration a superior form of continuing education.

Internships and training programs. As noted earlier, internships and district training programs are other means to attract, train, and expand the applicant pool. To be effective, teachers must perceive these training opportunities as assessable, open, valuable, and professional. According to Baltzell and Dentler, candidates in exemplary districts have a much greater sense of passing through a sequence of ever-narrowing gates as they are "weeded out" through credible training programs and internships.

In addition to providing diverse training opportunities, the exemplary districts have substantially sharpened their selection criteria and vacancy notifications, linking them to merit standards and specific needs. Many districts, on the other hand, do not clearly spell out selection criteria and do not announce specific school openings. Such practices contribute to yet another peril in finding the best principals.

Nonspecific Selection Criteria and Vacancy Announcements

Principal selection begins with the declaration of a vacancy. Far too often, districts do not specify in the vacancy announcement the particular school where there is an opening, especially in larger districts. Rather, the announcements call for applications for the principalship in general. Studies also show that many districts do not take the necessary time and care to clearly define and articulate what they are looking for in a principal and how they will determine if a candidate meets selection criteria. Developing clear criteria for the selection of principals and specifying the particular vacancy increases a district's likelihood of hiring a top-notch principal.

Unspecified Vacancy Announcements

Although most districts hire principals to serve in various schools during th eir tenure in a district, several advantages accrue when districts specify the particular school where a vacancy occurs. Without information on the special needs and characteristics of a school prior to selection, principals are undercut in their leadership roles, especially in the critical first year or two in a district. In addition, the district may not find the right person for the job.

Laura Fliegner argues that districts should provide the following types of information in vacancy announcements:

- needs to be accomplished by whoever fills the position
- important characteristics of the existing staff
- student's family background, cultures, extracurricular concerns, and feelings about school
- information about other executives in the school system

Unfortunately, too many changes in assignments may be necessary in larger school systems, requiring districts to develop more comprehensively general standards. But Baltzell and Dentler warn that "when the resulting set of standards becomes too general, the generalities detract from the vacancy pool and from screening efforts."

Nonspecific Selection Criteria

Not only is it essential for district personnel to develop and disseminate criteria that encompass all the duties and skills required for a principal opening; it is even more essential that they decide in advance what kinds of evidence they will gather to use in appraising candidates on the basis of the stated criteria. Lorri Manasse argues that

> School districts need to make more explicit their criteria for selecting principals. If they are to move toward an instructional component in their definition of principal effectiveness, they need to clearly articulate selection and evaluation criteria that reflect that definition.

Baltzell and Dentler agree:

> Even when a district clearly aligns a vacancy with a specific school, many districts do not spell out criteria pertinent to educational leadership such as experience with program planning, budgeting, staff development and evaluation, plant management, or community relations.

Definition of such criteria is often uniformly deferred until a candidate pool has been formed and review begun. Baltzell and Dentler state that "this lack of criterial specificity opens the way for widespread reliance on localistic notions of fit or image." For example, many districts in their study had a deeply held image of a "good" principal or a "top" candidate or "just what they were looking for." But instead of hiring a candidate for his or her skills or merit, these districts focused more on how a candidate would fit into the district. The hiring officials were swayed by their perceptions of a candidate's physical presence, projections of a certain self-confidence and assertiveness, and embodiment of community values and customary methods of operation.

In contrast, districts that employed exemplary selection practices gave precedence to "merit" over "fit." In the exemplary districts, screeners used a well-defined set of criteria to systematically sort and rank candidates before selecting finalists for interviews. Without such clear sets of criteria by which to screen and select candidates, the probability of districts hiring the most capable principal is certainly diminished.

Inadequate Screening and Selection Techniques

At the core of hiring the most capable principals is the screening and selection process. The consensus of research findings is that in American schools administrators often fail to gather multiple information about candidates and fail to thoroughly assess the necessary skills needed for exemplary leadership. Decisions to hire principals may be based too often on inadequate screening and selection procedures.

Screening

Screening typically involves two steps of increasing importance. First, the personnel office normally screens resumes and applications to determine the candidates who meet minimal certification and experience standards. Next, there is a more formalized paper screening of eligible candidates who pass the initial screening. It is here where many districts begin to falter.

Laura Fliegner believes school districts need to create comprehensive job descriptions and selection criteria, calling for feedback from representatives of staff members, students, community members, and administrators. Next, she says, "a district must develop a screening scheme and standardized ranking system by which screeners can systematically judge each applicant's file against their predetermined standards."

Exemplary districts have screeners conduct blind ratings of each candidate,

in which screeners assign a numerical score to each candidate's lengthy application and reference documentation. Assuming districts effectively handle these important preliminary steps, the issue of who screens is another problem.

Who screens? In his treatise on *Victims of Groupthink*, social psychologist Irving Janis uses the term *groupthink*

> as a quick and easy way to refer to a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivations to realistically appraise alternative courses of action....Groupthink refers to a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment that results from in-group pressures.

Finding signs of "groupthink" in the districts they studied, Baltzell and Dentler note that the tendency often occurs in districts where a small, close-knit group of senior administrators do all the screening. Over time, they lose their ability to correct each other's errors and judgment. The researchers say that

> Without some other participation (parents, teachers, principals, or students) screening looses its external credibility. It appears to take place in a way no one can attest to as trustworthy or well executed, except by the same team members.

Involving parents, teachers, principals, and even students on screening committees is one way a district can combat the "groupthink" syndrome. Exemplary school systems rely heavily on the participation of school-based as well as district-level administration and staff for screening and selecting principals.

Assessment centers. A promising option for screening potential principal candidates is the assessment center. Using an idea borrowed from the business world, the National Association of Secondary School Principals began the first assessment center in 1975. It is one of the most flourishing approaches to identify and screen prospective principals.

Having candidates experience a variety of simulations, the assessment center helps districts pinpoint potential principals' specific strengths and weaknesses in a dozen job-related areas: problem analysis, judgment, organizational ability, decisiveness, leadership, sensitivity, stress tolerance, oral communication, written communication, range of interests, personal motivation, and educational values. According to Sally Banks Zakariya, "The result is a 12-dimensional profile of each candidate, which can be used as a prescription for professional development as well as a screening device."

Validation studies of the centers show high correlations between performance on the simulations and actual on-the-job behavior. According to Neil Schmitt and his colleagues, the assessment center "represent a valuable, valid, job-relevant instrument" in screening and selecting principals.

Oregon began its participation in the assessment center project in 1983. Coordinated by the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators (COSA), the Oregon program has thirty-two cooperating districts and one hundred

trained assessors. According to Wayne Robbins, associate executive director of COSA and director of the Oregon Assessment Center, the Oregon center has assessed 432 candidates, of whom 111 have been promoted to principalships (63 female and 48 male).

Unfortunately, the cost of assessment centers deters many districts from participating. According to Robert Dentler, "They are fairly expensive and cumbersome to put into place. People are looking for shortcuts, and there just aren't any" (interviewed by Zakariya). "No shortcuts" might, in fact, be a fitting epitaph for the old-fashioned wink-and-nod school of picking principals. "When you spend time and effort on selecting good principals," says Dentler, "you get both short-term and long-term payoffs— not just good leaders, but good system operations."

The Interview

The interview is the most widely used selection technique and the technique most influential in hiring decisions. Yet the interview, if used incorrectly or used as the sole basis for hiring, is neither valid nor reliable. Commenting on the hiring of teachers, Mary Cihak Jensen says,

> Typically, the interview is unstructured, lasts less than one hour, and is highly influenced by first impressions, appearance, nonverbal behavior, and conversational skills.

Some studies suggest that interviewers may arrive at their decision to hire or reject an applicant within the first five minutes of the interview. The remainder of the interview can become a seeking of supportive evidence for the predetermined choice. According to E.C. Webster, "that early decision can be biased by what business calls the `old school tie syndrome', the tendency of interviewers to prefer applicants similar to themselves."

Districts using sophisticated selection techniques choose principals who tend not to fit the stereotype of the tall, white, male principal pushing middle age. Instead, in the exemplary systems, Dentler told his interviewer, "we found more women, blacks, hispanics and Asian-Americans. And more short people." In other words, selection in these districts is not based on looks, personality, fit, or first impressions, but instead on merit. How do you determine a candidate's merit? The much maligned interview process is not without promise.

Carefully select interviewers. Districts can improve the interview process by recognizing that not all people are equally adept at interviewing candidates. Jensen lists five qualifications for teacher interviewers that are applicable to principal selectors as well. Districts should select interviewers who have these qualifications:

- alertness to cues
- ability to make fine distinctions, perceive accurately
- ability to make immediate and accurate records
- willingness to use criteria established by the organization
- ability to suppress biases

Determining the individuals to involve in the interview is an important decision districts must make. Several studies recommend including parents, teachers, and principals on the interview team to acquire different perspectives, to create a sense of ownership in the process, and to gain support for the candidate who is finally selected. In exemplary districts, superintendents are heavily involved in establishing the principal selection process, but they often wait to interview only the two or three top candidates identified by the interview committee. According to the Baltzell and Dentler study, superintendents in exemplary districts

> delay involvement until the final moment in order to avoid any appearance of undue influence. If the perception gets out that it's a Good Old Person process, it's all over—you may as well get another superintendent.

Structure the interviews. The interviews are more reliable when they are structured: when candidates are asked the same, exact, predetermined, and well-thought-out questions. In addition, effective interviews include simulations, written exercises, and situational questions. This is in contrast to the practice of many districts, which conduct interviews in a casual manner, allowing candidates to actually control the flow of the interview.

Other Sources of Information

Of crucial importance is the gathering and assessment of a large variety of data about the candidates. The interview team should consider information gathered in the interview along with information gathered from other sources: applications, transcripts, teaching and administrative performance, references, and assessment center data. If the finalists are not from within the system, districts should also conduct site visits in finalists' schools and communities to verify if the candidates are as good as they appear. If districts rely solely upon a thirty- to sixty-minute interview to hire a principal, chances are high they will miss the best candidate.

To identify, prepare, and select the most capable principals, districts may have to invest more time and money, but as many studies suggest, it is an investment that pays rich dividends. As we look next at successful principal preparation and selection practices in Oregon schools, it is clear these districts are willing to make principal selection a top priority and invest the necessary time and resources to prepare and hire the most capable candidates.

Chapter 2

Oregon Schools Respond to the Challenges of Preparation

This chapter looks at the preparation of principals from an experiential perspective by documenting the experiences of two Oregon districts—Corvallis and David Douglas—with successful principal preparation programs. Although the districts' strategies vary, their goals are the same: preparing the most capable principals. To that end, the districts share many common features that enable them to groom future administrators. These techniques include active participation in COSA's Assessment Center, formal and informal indistrict training programs, internships and practicums, and a visible commitment of time and resources to principal preparation.

In Oregon, the challenge of preparing a pool of qualified principal candidates is similar to the challenge facing other states. Approximately half of all Oregon principals will retire in the next five to seven years, according to Wayne Robbins, associate executive director of COSA. This fact certainly presents a "window of opportunity" for Oregon districts to train and select outstanding principals.

As evidence reviewed in the previous chapter shows, exemplary school districts do not leave the identification and preparation of outstanding principals to chance. Instead, these school systems devote a great deal of resources for training cadres of aspirants to increase their pools of qualified candidates. Extensive, district-designed programs are the norm in exemplary districts. We first feature such a program designed by administrators in the David Douglas School District.

David Douglas's STAR Program

In January 1987, the David Douglas School District (1987-88 enrollment approximately 6,000 students in 11 schools) launched STAR—a district staff development program entitled, "Selecting and Training Administrative Recruits." STAR has proved to be an excellent strategy for identifying and

training prospective principals from within the district's teacher corps.

David Douglas administrators designed STAR, in part, to improve the district's pool of principal candidates. "Many David Douglas administrators have reached retirement age," says Superintendent Tony Palermini. "It was obvious we needed to develop a way to increase the pool of qualified candidates from both within and outside David Douglas." According to Ron Russell, assistant superintendent, thirteen of the district's twenty-five administrators are currently fifty-five years of age or older. "Only four elementary principals will not retire within the next one to three years," Russell points out. "The district expects to fill many principalships during this time period, and we want to have a pool of qualified candidates from which to choose."

Emphasis on Practical Experience

In addition to the need for grooming a cadre of well-trained candidates for principalships, STAR was also designed to provide principal hopefuls with practical, district-specific training that would enhance the theoretical instruction provided in university administrative programs. "Practical experience is often missing from the study of educational administration at the university level," says Barbara Rommel, staff development coordinator for the district and STAR codirector.

The program provides teachers with the opportunity to learn about the principalship from those who are already on the firing line. It is a way for aspirants to learn about "administrative responsibilities with the help of experienced administrators," Rommel notes. All David Douglas principals, administrators, supervisors, and directors take part in some aspect of the presentations. Coordinated through Portland State University so participants can receive three hours of graduate credit, STAR is the only regional program, apart from an administrators' academy operated by the Seattle School District, that focuses on teaching administration from the vantage point of a particular school district, according to Jack Lind, Portland State University professor of education (interviewed by Mary Wilbert Smith).

Phases to the Training

Of STAR's three phases, the first involves a series of ten weekly classes about educational administration, specific to David Douglas. Each class covers different aspects of administration, led by a team of David Douglas administrators. Subjects are grouped according to four roles of the administrator:

> *A member of the administrative team.* An opening session includes presentations by the superintendent and principals from the elementary, middle, and high school levels on the administrative team structure in the district and each member's responsibilities.

Educational program coordinator. Directors of programs such as special education, instructional materials, music, and PE outline their respective roles and relationship with district principals.

Instructional leader. Two principals and the curriculum director focus on components of an instructional leader such as research, classroom strategies, staff development, evaluation of programs, and skills in dealing with people.

A building manager. Supervisors from business, transportation, food service, and data processing discuss their interaction with school principals and the principal's extensive involvement in these various areas of district operations.

Other sessions in phase 1 include the role of the administrator as disciplinarian, personnel manager, community relations specialist, financial wizard, and first-year rookie. All sessions include opportunities for class participation by means of questions and answers, brainstorming sessions, and small-group work. Class participants also produce a "Personal Reaction" paper on each session that includes a summary of each presentation and participants' thoughts on each particular role of the principalship.

Phase 2 of STAR includes a week-long practicum experience, based on a plan that each participant designs in phase 1. During this second phase, mentor relationships are established between participants and administrators. Interested candidates also attend the COSA assessment center for evaluation and training, sponsored by the district.

In the final phase, the district establishes formal internships with building principals for identified and interested candidates. In addition, the district offers a series of workshops in the second year of the program that further explore topics in educational leadership.

Benefits of the STAR Program

Although STAR is designed to provide David Douglas teachers with information about becoming a principal in their own district, the thirty participants take the class for several reasons. Some are in the process of getting their administrative credentials and want to get the David Douglas perspective on what they have learned. Others, undecided about wanting to go into administration, take the classes to help them decide. The STAR program provides participants the needed insights into school administration to help them make that decision.

"STAR really gave us a bird's eye view of what's happening to an administrator every day. By taking the class every week, we connected the ongoing issues of the district with what we heard from participants," said Mike Straw, a David Douglas middle school teacher, when interviewed by Mary Wilbert. Dona Russie, an elementary teacher, told Smith: "The class has given me a greater understanding of the total picture, and how everything—even 'unwritten' philosophies—fit together."

In addition to giving participants an accurate view of day-to-day life in the principal's chair, STAR also sends a clear message to teachers that David Douglas is willing to invest in their personnel to find and groom its future

leaders. According to Barbara Rommel, David Douglas has established a tradition of promoting district teachers to various administrative positions. "This practice," she notes, "has contributed to a strong sense of organizational culture. Staff members speak of the 'David Douglas way' and refer to district activities in terms of 'we' and 'our'."

On the other hand, "the tradition of hiring from within is not so strong to preclude discussing the benefits of 'new blood' or hiring talented individuals from outside the district," Rommel adds. Of six administrative positions filled during 1986-87, two were filled by candidates from outside David Douglas. "The STAR program is not meant to imply that participants will be the only candidates considered," says Rommel. "It is intended to communicate that the district recognizes and appreciates the skills and talents of its staff and is willing to provide them with additional training and career options."

Another plus of the STAR program is the professional benefits it provides existing administrators. Rommel says that the program gives presenters "the opportunity for self-analysis of their job. It makes them examine their own behavior, thoughts, and philosophy before they can share the information with thirty prospective principals." According to Harriet Jackson, principal of West Powellhurst Elementary and program presenter on instructional leadership, STAR "gave me an opportunity to reflect on what an instructional leader really does, and I was able to get valuable information disseminated among teachers."

David Douglas's training program has benefitted the district by increasing teachers' awareness of the role principals play in creating excellence in education. In addition, it sends an important message to employees that the district values their competence and is interested in supporting their investigation of and preparation in school administration. Rommel sums up David Douglas administrators' feelings on STAR: "We feel that STAR has the potential of creating a pool of 'shining' candidates for future administrative openings, willing to carry on the tradition of excellence in David Douglas schools or in other districts."

Corvallis's Internship

In addition to district-designed training programs, like the one in David Douglas, exemplary districts provide principal aspirants with on-the-job experiences that allow candidates to get their feet wet before stepping into a principalship. As we saw in chapter 1, the full-time internship is one strategy that several studies and leading educators recommend. The Corvallis School District (1987-88 enrollment approximately 6,800 students in 16 schools) began its internship program in 1973.

Tom Wogaman, superintendent, views the position of assistant to the superintendent as an ideal training ground for future principals and central office administrators. Wogaman knows from personal experience the benefits

that such an internship provides: he held such a position in the Berkeley Schools (California) prior to his appointment to the superintendency in another district. By bringing aspiring administrators out of the classroom and giving them a full-time internship, Wogaman explains, "they have a variety of administrative experiences: rubbing shoulders with all administrators and participating in various aspects of school administration."

Although one of the chief responsibilities of the assistant is to act as a trouble shooter for the superintendent, Wogaman gives the individual responsibility for a number of activities that fine-tune his or her leadership skills in real-life administrative situations. Under the tutelage of Wogaman, other central office administrators, and building principals, the assistant is appointed to a three-year, full-time internship.

The district compensates the assistant with wages above a regular teacher's salary, but less than that of a principal. "We also guarantee the individual a regular classroom position upon completion of the program," Wogaman says, but most of the assistants have moved on to principalships or central office positions. As a member of the administration, the assistant must also give up membership in the teacher's union and have or begin work on an administrative credential.

Selection of the Assistant

Wogaman is proud of Corvallis's selection process, not only for the assistant to the superintendent position, but for the principalship as well. The district uses broad participation of staff on screening and interview teams including central office administrators, principals, teachers, classified personnel, and union representatives. Although the composition of the interview committee is tailored for each administrative opening, the process is the same.

For the principal selection process, Wogaman says, first "the committee screens and interviews candidates and identifies the top candidates, unranked." Next, "the committee gives me a pro and con analysis of each, and then I interview and make the final selection." Wogaman stays out of the committee process, because that way, he says, "people view it as open and fair. The interview committee is also a tremendous screener for me. I don't have to go through all the screening process, but instead deal with just the nuggets."

The process for selecting the assistant to the superintendent is similar. A tailored committee, typically composed of former incumbents in the position, principals, and a central office secretary or two, screen and interview candidates before Wogaman interviews the committee's top candidates and makes the final decision. The position is advertised for two weeks throughout the district, and all teachers in the district are free to apply. Usually, there are anywhere from four to twelve interested staff members.

Varied Responsibilities

Originally, the assistant to the superintendent was responsible for general

trouble-shooting activities. This role includes doing a variety of footwork for the superintendent on pertinent issues, standing in for him at various community meetings, and many other activities. Over the years, however, Wogaman has added the following specific responsibilities to the position:

Community Relations Coordinator
Informal Student and Employee Hearing Officer Affirmative Action Officer
Chair of Ad Hoc Task Groups
Troubleshooter for the Superintendent
Policy Committee Leadership

The assistant also works closely with building principals and central office administrators on varied issues and attends all principal and superintendent cabinet meetings. In addition, Wogaman says he uses the assistant as his personal "sounding board." In return, "I expect personal loyalty from the assistant." To Wogaman, loyalty means "a mutual, two-way commitment to each other's success: I want them to be very high on keeping me successful in fulfilling the superintendency, and I also have an obligation to help them have a successful experience."

Two-Way Benefits

Several benefits are inherent in this internship program. According to Wogaman, the position has many spin-off benefits for the district's administrative team. By bringing a classroom teacher into the cadre of district administrators, the assistant "often contributes a vital perspective, from a teacher's viewpoint," that is beneficial during administrative deliberations.

The advantages for the intern or assistant are numerous. According to Marie Melin, Adams Elementary principal and former assistant to the superintendent, "my troubleshooting role as assistant to the superintendent gave me a number of experiences that have helped me be a better principal." She lists a few personal examples:

Group leadership: I definitely learned how to organize and lead groups: how to help a group set goals and how to function as a group leader.

Public speaking: Lots of public speaking and presentation experiences are required in the assistantship. For me, the speaking experiences were very beneficial in preparing me for the principalship.

Organizational skills: In the position, the assistant learns how to work with a secretary, plan schedules, keep a calendar, set personal goals, set goals with a group, and follow through to ensure tasks are completed. There is a big jump from the classroom to the principalship, and the experience really helped me make that transition.

Broadened perspective: Learning the comprehensive nature of the district and how the principalship fits into the entire district process is a real benefit. The more you know about district dynamics, the easier it is to deal with issues. If a principal colleague has a problem with the district office, I am able to show him or her how to resolve it.

The district's comprehensive process for training and selecting administrators has another benefit. According to Wogaman, Corvallis's administrative preparation and selection process has brought many more talented women into building and district leadership positions. Four women and two men have served in the role of assistant to the superintendent over the years. The district's overall administrative team now consists of nineteen women and twenty men. Of the sixteen principals, nine are women and seven are men. As Wogaman said, "We are attempting to recruit our leadership from the whole population, not just half of it."

Looking Back and Looking Ahead

The assistant to the superintendent position in Corvallis has certainly contributed to the professional advancement of the individuals who have held the post. Two of the former assistants are now principals in Corvallis, one is an E.S.D. superintendent, and another is a director of secondary education. The training and practical experiences these individuals received in their internship provided them with numerous skills to successfully lead educational organizations.

Wogaman, in looking to future possibilities, is considering rotating the principalship of a small elementary school in the district (125 students) as another three-year internship position. Under the mentorship and supervision of a district principal, the intern would receive a full-time training opportunity. Such an internship would compliment the numerous part-time leadership experiences available to teachers in Corvallis, and, together with the other internship, provide just what national leaders are recommending to train capable principals.

Chapter 3

Exemplary Screening and Selection Procedures in Oregon Schools

As the national studies highlighted in chapter 1 document, districts that hire the most capable and talented principals use sophisticated screening and selection procedures. Albert Davidian, assistant superintendent of personnel for Tigard Public Schools, says sophistication is a necessity. "We are in a very competitive business, and we must make sure, through our process, we don't miss the best candidates."

This chapter examines two Oregon districts—Tigard and Lake Oswego—that have developed comprehensive screening and selection procedures. Although Tigard's and Lake Oswego's strategies vary, they share many common features. These include comprehensive screening techniques to identify promising candidates, structured interviews, and thorough reference checks. We first look at Lake Oswego's process.

Lake Oswego School District

The intensity of the screening and selection process in Lake Oswego (1987-88 enrollment approximately 5,630 students in 11 schools) has increased during the last few years, according to Gerald Hesling, director of personnel services. "The district is selecting principals based on merit: they (candidates) must prove their skill during the selection process," he said.

The district is also involving a lot more people in the selection process to gain as many perceptions as possible about candidates. Hesling said Superintendent Bill Korach has emphasized participation from various audiences in the decision-making process. Lake Oswego's screening and interview committees are tailored to the circumstances of each principal vacancy and include the following representatives from each school:

- at least two teacher representatives
- two classified representatives
- one or two parents selected by the parent organization
- one student (at the high school level only) selected by the student body officers
- one school board member (optional)
- director of curriculum, assistant superintendent, and Hesling (personnel director)

Before this broad group of participants screen and interview principal applicants, a vacancy announcement is designed and distributed for the particular opening.

Vacancy Announcement

Lake Oswego's vacancy announcement is very specific and detailed. In addition, the announcement is published in job placement listings at various colleges and in professional association mailings throughout the Northwest. The announcement includes information on salary compensation, contract length, certification and degree requirements, and, most important, a specific list of skills and qualifications that Lake Oswego is looking for in a candidate. These include the following:

- Strong, effective instructional leadership skills
- Management skills, including evidence of thoughtful decision-making and problem-solving skills; and strong organizational skills
- Sensitivity to people; strong interpersonal skills
- Familiarity with effective schools research
- Significant experience as an elementary or high school principal or central office administrator, preferably in a district of comparable size
- Successful teaching experience
- Strong oral and written communication skills

The district asks applicants to demonstrate their written communication skills by including in their application materials a response to a series of pertinent questions, devoting a half-page essay to each question. Some examples of these questions are as follows:

1. Define your philosophy of education as applied to a modern K-6 elementary school.
2. What are some key descriptors of leadership and management? Give some examples of how you personally have used these elements to advantage.
3. Entrenched faculties and organizations can often be resistant to change. What processes will you employ in moving a school organization toward your envisioned change?
4. As a principal new to our district you choose to introduce yourself to the staff by providing working definitions of *teaching* and *learning*. How do you introduce yourself?

5. Recently the *Oregonian* editorialized that only after parents got involved in the schools has education improved. How will you direct into productive channels the energies of an active school community?

Having the applicants provide several short written essays "gives us a good idea of how candidates express themselves in writing, how they think," says Hesling. In addition, "we have a strong feeling about the use of language as one mark of an educated person." Candidates have told Hesling that this written exercise forced them to focus their philosophy into a succinct statement and quickly get to the crux of key issues.

Screening

Once the application deadline is reached, Hesling conducts a preliminary screening of the application files and "weeds out" candidates who do not meet minimum qualifications or whose files are incomplete. Next, he conducts a four-hour training session with the screening and interview committee. Incorporated into this session are discussions of various laws that govern the selection process, such as "protected classes" of candidates, interviewing techniques, appropriate and inappropriate questions, and formulation of interview questions by the committee.

Hesling gives each committee member a rating sheet for assessing candidates' application materials. With this sheet, committee members rate each candidate on a five-point scale in several areas that are tied to the skills and qualifications outlined in the vacancy announcement. Committee members also give their overall assessment of each candidate on this same five-point scale. When the committee members complete their paper screening of candidates, they meet and go into "consensus building," says Hesling. The committee usually identifies five to ten candidates whom Hesling invites for an interview. In offering these candidates an interview, Hesling says, "we ask them for a copy of their profiles from COSA's assessment center, if they have been evaluated." Lake Oswego has been actively involved in COSA's assessment center since its inception; the district sends teachers who are interested in administrative leadership positions to the center for evaluation. Although the assessment center profile is not required of a candidate, "we recommend it and are particularly interested in the area of sensitivity to others on the profile," Hesling notes.

Administrators in the district who have been trained as assessors review the finalists' assessment profiles and report back to the committee. Hesling views the assessment profile as confidential information; he says, "I would rather err on the side of confidentiality than have people review the information who may not know how to interpret it."

Interview Process

Hesling characterizes Lake Oswego's interview process as "very structured." The interview is structured because, as he puts it, "we want to control the situation. The interview is our agenda, not the candidates'." Four

characteristics give the interview process its structure:

- The district develops specific, well-thought-out questions prior to the interview sessions.
- One committee member (Hesling) poses all the questions to candidates in the same impartial manner.
- Each committee member keeps accurate notes and rates candidates on their responses to each question with an interview rating sheet.
- Committee members are trained to be neutral in their reactions to candidates' responses, not only verbally, but also by facial expressions and body language.

Interview Questions

A key element in Lake Oswego's interviews are a set of situational questions that require candidates to formulate and provide answers to real-life school problems. "We want to see how a candidate responds to situations when there is no right answer," says Hesling. And "we look for a consistent flow or philosophy in how they answer the questions." These situational questions help to "screen out people who have one philosophy for one situation and another philosophy for a different situation," Hesling points out. A few examples of these situational questions are as follows:

1. As a principal, you face a student who has been sent to the office for making an obscene gesture to a teacher. The student reports that the teacher has on more than one occasion called him a "jerk" in front of the class. What are the issues and what will you do?

2. The district has a practice that athletic teams playing in a state championship late night game may come to school two hours late the following morning. The district also requires band and rally to attend the game. You are approached by members of the rally squad and band who want the same consideration as that given the team because they are required to be in attendance. How will you respond?

3. You're the only administrator in the building. A parent bursts into your office and in loud, derisive language complains that a teacher has dealt unfairly with his student. The parent has a long list of complaints but focuses primarily on a recent classroom confrontation. The student has a history of being a troublemaker. How will you deal with the parent?

Eight to twelve of these situational questions are asked each candidate. Upon completion of all interviews, the committee members go through another consensus building session in which they tally rating sheets and consider information from references, application materials, and interview responses. In the end, the committee identifies two or three top candidates and gives those names to the superintendent for him to interview. Sometimes, however, the superintendent sits through the interviews and participates in the consensus process to identify the top candidates, Hesling said.

Site Reference Checks and Employment Decision

The final step in Lake Oswego's selection process is a detailed reference

check on each finalist. Hesling and selected committee members conduct telephone interviews with parents, teachers, and administrators in each candidate's current district. This provides the committee with further insights and perceptions into each candidate's actual skills and performance record. In the end, the superintendent makes the final employment decision based on the interviews, committee recommendations, and site reference check information. The successful candidate is then offered the position.

Reactions to the Process

The candidates who have gone through Lake Oswego's selection process view it as very rigorous and structured. Carolyn Atkins, newly appointed vice-principal at Lake Oswego High School, said, "It was the best selection process I have gone through." Atkins described the interview process as very thorough: "The interview and questions were structured in such a way that I could not negotiate with the committee and get the questions to be ones I wanted to answer." She added, "the committee did not give away any of the answers they wanted by facial expressions or encouraging responses."

Atkins also felt the interview committee had done their homework by asking specific questions. "A lot of thinking and planning went into the interview questions, and the committee knew what they were looking for. This told me what specifically they felt was needed in a vice-principal." Atkins believes the strength of Lake Oswego's interview process is the situational questions posed to candidates. "The situational questions are exactly how you live and, from that perspective, it was excellent: putting people in real-life situations is exactly what you should do."

Sally Lehmann, another new vice-principal at Lake Oswego High School, believes the selection process was "comprehensive. I have interviewed in several districts and this was the most intense." Lehmann was impressed with the broad representation on the interview committee and "with the committee's resourcefulness in gathering information on how I worked with teachers and students from my former district."

Hesling sums up administrators' feelings on Lake Oswego's principal selection process: "It is not a 'good-old-boy' system, but instead is based on a candidate's merit. The merit system takes a lot of time, but it is worth it." By devoting a great deal of time and energy to selection, Lake Oswego is selecting the best of the best for its principalships.

That same energy and commitment of time is evident in Tigard Public Schools. Many of the steps in Tigard's process are similar to Lake Oswego's, but there are variations. In this final section, we look at Tigard's clinical model for identifying and selecting the most capable principals.

Tigard Public Schools

Tigard School District (1987-88 enrollment approximately 7,100 students

in 12 schools) has been fine-tuning its comprehensive principal selection process to "become more clinical in our approach," said Albert Davidian, assistant superintendent of personnel. Through an elaborate, indepth process, which includes simulations in clinical supervision, Tigard is selecting the best candidates for their principalships.

Announcement of Vacancy

Like Lake Oswego, Tigard identifies a specific school vacancy and then advertises the position throughout the Northwest states. In an attractive announcement brochure, the district enumerates details about the particular principal opening, including characteristics of the school such as projected enrollment, makeup of student population, and types of facilities; a profile of the school staff; and information on the Tigard community, school superintendent, and school board. In addition, the brochure lists several required and preferred qualifications, skills, and traits the district wants candidates to have. Many of these are similar to Lake Oswego's; the following list includes only those that are unique to Tigard:

Required Qualifications
- Demonstrated leadership in clinical supervision
- Outstanding performance as a school improvement leader
- A record of successful community relations

Preferred Qualifications
- Staff development experiences

Personal Traits
- A sensitivity to people
- A rapport with students
- A sense of humor
- The ability to encourage and use the information and opinions of diverse groups in decision-making

As part of the application process, candidates are also required to submit a brief written description of two administrative accomplishments during the past year. The district does not have candidates fill out an application form. Davidian noted, "We don't require it because filling out a district form just duplicates information in a candidates' resumes, placement files, and information that we ask them to submit." Davidian reported the district has received favorable comments from applicants regarding this practice.

Screening Committee Composition

In contrast to Lake Oswego, Tigard does not always include parents, students, and teachers from the building on the screening and interview committee. "We have tried the large committee approach," said Davidian, "but it can become a 'beauty contest' where the candidates parade for the committee to put themselves in the best light." According to Davidian, the district, trying to be consistent with its clinical approach, involves principals, central office

administrators, and staff development teachers "who have the expertise to test and assess a candidate's skills through various simulations."

Davidian added that the district has not ruled out broadened participation. "If we had a school where community support needed to be strengthened, we would probably again use that approach. It's not that the large committee is improper, but our goal is to find a top-notch instructional leader, and the clinical approach helps us find that individual."

Davidian does believe the inclusion of building principals and staff development teachers on the screening and interview committee allows the district to "get various perspectives on all dimensions of what a principal candidate should be." This participation also makes the process fair and precludes "a 'good-old-boy' network where a favorite of the central office administration is preselected," he said.

Tigard uses a screening system similar to Lake Oswego's; Davidian's office conducts a preliminary screening of all applications. Screeners then use a comprehensive rating sheet to assess each candidate on the required skills and standards and to reach consensus on several candidates to interview. In Tigard, "the Superintendent also is included as an equal participant in the screening and interview process," Davidian pointed out.

Tigard is also actively involved in COSA's assessment center and requests profiles from candidates who have been assessed. Davidian said, "We are impressed with the assessment center simulations and believe the assessments provide the district with one important piece of information on each candidate." Because the assessment center is still in its infancy, Davidian said the district does not require that applicants be assessed, so as not to preclude anyone. "However, we will state that an assessment center profile is desired in future vacancy announcements."

The Interview

A structured interview with the full committee is the first step in Tigard's selection process. The committee schedules a three-hour interview with each candidate and, like Lake Oswego, asks the candidates a series of predetermined questions. In contrast to Lake Oswego, different committee members ask questions in the particular areas in which they have expertise or for which they are responsible. Although individual committee members prepare their questions and preferred answers prior to the interview, the entire committee reaches consensus on the specific questions each interviewer will ask.

During the interview, committee members take detailed, anecdotal records of candidates' responses and, after the interview, complete a rating sheet on each candidate. The interviews are also videotaped to "help us evaluate our interview process and to help verify our interview notes," Davidian said. After this initial interview, a unique feature of Tigard's process begins.

Simulations

At the core of Tigard's selection process is the simulation exercises. First, Davidian reported, each candidate completes a fifty-minute written simulation. "They are given a situational question in which to write a response so we can assess their writing ability and philosophy on an issue," he said. In addition, "we compare this exercise with the written statement each candidate prepares as part of the application process."

Next, candidates individually view a twenty-minute classroom lesson, designed specifically for the interview simulation by a staff development teacher. The candidate then prepares an observation report and holds a conference with the staff development teacher who taught the lesson. A committee member observes this conference. Finally, the staff development teacher rates each candidate on his or her conferencing and observation skills. "We feel this simulation provides another useful insight on each applicant that is very important," Davidian said.

Upon completion of all interviews and simulations, the entire committee again meets to review their notes, the videotape, information from simulations, rating sheets, and assessment center data (if available). The committee then reaches a consensus on the finalists.

Site Visits

In contrast to Lake Oswego's telephone reference checks with individuals in the finalists' home district, Tigard Superintendent Russell Joki arranges site visits in the top candidates' school districts. According to Davidian, "The superintendent may take one or two committee members along to gain a first-hand impression from students, faculty, parents, and superiors on the candidate's performance in his or her current school." After the site visits, the entire committee reconvenes and reviews once again the finalists. At this meeting, the superintendent selects the top candidate.

Merit Wins Out

Davidian said that Tigard's clinical approach to principal selection has enabled the district to hire candidates based on merit, not on first impressions or preference as favorite sons. "The whole approach gives each candidate highly individualized attention and, with the reactions to the process we have received, candidates view it as open and fair." Tigard's intensive, clinical approach is just what national reports say needs to be the norm.

As we have seen from the examples of Oregon districts recorded in these pages, preparing and selecting principals demands that a district invest a great deal of time and resources. Now what remains for us to do is to summarize some of the key findings in the form of recommendations for districts that want to improve their process of selecting participants.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The principalship is the single most powerful force for improving school effectiveness. Although better selection of school leaders is not the complete remedy for educational problems, it offers an important beginning. An effective preparation process based on a clear view of the principal's role, combined with better screening and selection techniques, can help usher in a new era of productivity in American schools. As the U.S. Department of Education's *Principal Selection Guide* states, sound selection of school leaders "is one of the most economical options for significantly improving schools."

The practices of Oregon schools recorded in these pages provide varied examples of how to identify, groom, and hire principals who can achieve excellence in schools. On the basis of their efforts and of the contemporary research literature, we have seen that the following strategies characterize a successful program of principal preparation and selection. Determining whether these strategies are absent or present in their district may help administrators and school boards to assess the status of their principal preparation and selection methods.

1. ***Develop written policies.*** As a beginning, school boards need to develop written policies that declare the district's commitment to hiring the most capable principals. Before the board can decide upon a selection process, its members must first agree on their aims. What kind of schools do they want to foster? What kind of administrator are they looking for?

Once the board has agreed upon their aims, they can decide the specific criteria to be used when the district starts looking for a principal. To that end, the board should require intensive job analysis prior to hiring.

2. ***Develop specific selection criteria.*** It is essential that selectors, before announcing a vacancy, develop specific criterial standards that encompass all the duties and skills required in the principalship. Selectors should consider and solicit, formally or informally, the opinions of teachers, parents, students, and other administrators concerning the kind of principal they want and need.

Even technically sound selection processes will fail if school officials have not scrupulously examined their own visions for the school, their aims in selecting candidates, and what kind of evidence will be gathered to use in appraising candidates on the basis of stated criteria.

3. ***Identify the specific opening in vacancy announcements.*** Although districts often hire principals to serve in different schools during their years of service to the district, identifying the particular school opening in the job vacancy notification is advantageous. Knowing the specific needs and characteristics of the school can help the new principal prepare for a successful experience and can help selectors identify the best principal for the position. Vacancy announcements should include pertinent information about the school: composition of staff and students, community characteristics, and so forth. In addition, the announcements should spell out the skills, traits, and experiences necessary for a candidate to successfully compete for the position.

4. ***Create a pool of qualified candidates.*** Long before specific vacancies arise, the district should identify a pool of potential leaders and develop a "pipeline" to the principalship. Such a system can provide the developmental experiences that will qualify members of the pool to be principals. District training programs, internships, and the assignment of teachers to various leadership roles are all ways to groom a cadre of capable candidates. Better yet, a training and internship program that welcomes women and minority candidates can offset any built-in disadvantages for these groups.

5. ***Recruit widely.*** School districts not only need to train their own people for future principalships, but they must also aggressively recruit outside the district. "New blood" is one benefit, but finding the best is another. Advertising widely in college job placement bulletins and professional organizations' newsletters is one outside recruitment means. Targeting talented individuals in other districts and helping them establish an entry to the district's network is another recruitment strategy. Districts increase their odds of finding the best candidates when they welcome a large number of applicants.

6. ***Involve a broad base of people in screening and selection.*** Districts' use of selection teams increases the reliability of interviews by combining the judgments and perceptions of a variety of individuals. Including school-based administrators, teachers, and parents can combat the "groupthink" syndrome that may be evident in small, cohesive groups of central office administrators.

7. ***Train those who select principals.*** Choosing a capable principal is a critical yet difficult task. Involving a broader base of people in the screening and selection process will require that districts train those individuals in legal guidelines and multiple assessment techniques. Without such training, interviewers' choices may be unduly influenced by factors such as attitude congruence, first impressions, biases, and a notion of "fit" versus "merit."

8. ***Use multiple means of assessment.*** Districts should use a combination of strategies to screen and select principals. Although the district

can design the interview to be effective, assessment center data, written simulations, clinical simulations, and situational questions should also be part of districts' selection processes. These techniques help districts increase their chances of selecting a principal based on merit and skill.

9. ***Consider varied sources of information about candidates.*** In addition to simulations that give districts direct samples of candidates' skills, districts would be well advised to collect information from other sources as well. Site visits, references, academic records, and written statements of philosophy are other needed types of information that districts should garnish.

10. ***Finding the most capable principal doesn't end with selection.*** Although the search for a principal ends when he or she is hired, the selection process is far from over. Selecting good leaders is only half the battle; the other half is helping them succeed and grow in the job. Well-organized postselection activities, including orientations, professional development, opportunities for networking, and on-the-job assistance from experienced administrators, are more likely to help newly hired principals succeed.

The costs of a good training and selection process are minimal compared to the financial and emotional costs of hiring a mediocre principal. Districts that want to select outstanding principals will not leave finding them to chance, but instead will devote the necessary time and resources to systematically prepare and select the most capable school leaders.

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